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ABSTRACT

Philosophical works and sociological writings from the seventeenth through the twentieth century are analyzed in this paper to learn the degree to which their use of generics (linguistic terms such as "mankind" that are used to refer to all humans) can be said to have actual reference to all adults without consideration of sex. The paper notes that it is not easy to determine when a writer is using terms such as "man," "mankind," or "human nature" generically and suggests that writers are likely to slip in and out of generic usage of terminology without appearing to notice what is happening. Three causes are cited for the ambiguity of the terms "man" and "mankind": the words themselves have dual reference, a rule of English grammar insists that the pronoun replacement of terms referring to human beings generically be masculine, and many generics, such as "salesman," are semantically marked as masculine words. Examples taken from writers such as Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, David Hume, George Mead, and Vilfredo Pareto are used to exemplify the ways in which the generic use of words actually reflects a masculine orientation to the world. (MKM)

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MAN (EMBRACING WOMAN):

THE GENERIC IN SOCIOLOGICAL WRITING

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There are close ties between generics (linguistic terms like mankind, used to refer to all humans) and sociology (the study of human behavior and human institutions). Inevitably, sociologists, in writing generalizations about people, will make extensive use of generics as cover terms for their subject matter. Both sociology and generics, in fact, have given rise to the same illustrative metaphor. Malinowsky is said to have remarked of socio/anthropology that it is "a study of man (embracing woman)" (quoted in Smelser 1967), and Frank Lloyd Wright is reported to have said, in explaining generics, "The term man is used as man embracing woman" (quoted in Murray 1973). I do not intend to answer here the question of the degree to which sociologists embrace women in their thoughts about humanity, but rather to analyze the degree to which their use of generics can be said to have reference to adults, generally, without consideration of sex.

As several scholars have already noticed, it is not easy to decide when a writer is using terms like man, mankind, or human nature generically (Martyna 1978, reviews the scholarship). Few writers are so specific as the speaker in the Steig cartoon, who says to his friend, "When I say mankind, one thing I don't mean is womankind" (reproduced in Miller and Swift 1972). Writers are more likely to slip in and out of generic usage of terminology without appearing to notice what is happening. Jessica Murray (1973) has described a philosophy lecture entitled, "The Images of

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Man," which began: "How does Man see himself? As a salesman? A doctor? A dentist?" (So far the speaker might be using Man generically, referring to women as well as to men.) "As far as sexuality goes," he continued, "the Kinsey reports on the activities of the American male surely affect his self-image in this regard . . . ." (It becomes clear that the reference is masculine.)

The ambiguity of the terms man and mankind has three sources. First, the words have dual reference, meaning either "male" or "human beings." Although the earliest use of both terms was generic, the generic sense has gradually diminished over the centuries, giving way to a secondary meaning, "male." Today the generic force of man is so weak that the term is considered by the Oxford English Dictionary to be obsolete as a generic if preceded by articles (a man, the man) and ambiguous in other contexts (men, all men, any man, and so forth). This semantic change was facilitated by a second source of ambiguity, the rule of English which specifies that the pronoun replacement of terms referring to human beings generically be masculine ("How does Man see himself?"). A third source of ambiguity is the fact that many generics (like salesman, doctor, and dentist in the quotation above) are semantically marked [+Male] in English (Blaubergs 1975). As a consequence, other generics occurring in context with them (mankind and people, for instance) are also interpreted as having masculine reference (Dubois and Crouch 1978).

In tracing the developing use of generics in sociological writing, the reader encounters problems from all three sources. Some generic usage is ambiguous simply because of the semantic ambiguity of words containing the morpheme man (congressman) or because such words are replaced with the masculine pronoun (the congressman . . . he). Other generics are ambiguous

because they occur in contexts containing terms specifically marked [+Male] (men of the business world). Sociological writing provides a non-linguistic source of ambiguity, as well. Historically, the male has been considered to be the archetypal human being. What is true of males has been thought to be true of human nature. What is not true of males has been taken to be deviant. As a result, discussions of human beings frequently have a masculine orientation, even when true generics are used. How can one decide whether or not a generic reference is intended? Some writers define their terminology, specifying exactly what they mean by such words as man. Others use explicitly marked generic phrases (men and women, the student . . . , he/she). Most writers, however, use generics loosely, and the test must be of whether or not the reference is consistent. If the generics could always refer to women as well as to men, then the reader may assume that the writer is attempting to describe human nature or society generally. If the writer shifts in and out of generic usage, as does the speaker quoted by Murray, then the reader may infer that the writer has a masculine orientation toward the material, whether acknowledged or not.

This paper results from an analysis of philosophical works and sociological writings from the seventeenth through the twentieth century. Authors frequently cited as sources of modern sociological thought in such texts as introductions to sociology, collected readings in sociology, and the International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences were chosen.

Early writers seem to have taken masculine behavior to be archetypal behavior. Consequently, their generic terminology has a strongly masculine bias. Typical of the seventeenth century orientation is Thomas Hobbes, whose definition of the term man makes clear his male perspective:

And a common name, being the name of many things severally taken,

> but not collectively of all together (as man is not the name of all mankind, but of every one, as of Peter, John, and the rest severally) is therefore called an universal name;
>
> (Elements of Philosophy I, 1, ii)

With Hobbes, the reader is forewarned that terms we think of today as generic were meant to refer to males "severally." Usually women had no place in his speculations, as in the following passage, where the question of whether or not nature had made men and women equal, or women equal to other women, simply does not arise:

> Nature hath made men so equall, in the faculties of body, and mind; as that though there bee found one man sometimes manifestly stronger in body, or of quicker mind than another; yet when all is reckoned together, the difference between man, and man, is not so considerable, as that one man can thereupon claim himselfe any benefit.
>
> (Leviathan xiii)

Hobbes does occasionally refer to women explicitly, as in the following passage. However, in grouping them with material possessions of the male, he sets women apart from the subject of his speculations about human nature, men:

> So that in the nature of man we find three principall causes of quarrel. First, Competition; Secondly, Diffidence, Thirdly, Glory.
>
> The first, maketh men invade for Gain; the second, for Safety; and the third, for Reputation. The first use Violence, to make themselves Masters of other mens persons, wives, children,

and cattell;

(Ibid.)

John Locke moved toward a generic usage, expanding the reference of terms like man to include "what is common to Peter, James, Mary, and Jane after further exclusions have been made" (Essay Concerning Human Understanding III, iii). Nevertheless, his use of generics is often ambiguous. The following seems to be a generic use of mankind, referring not only to Peter and James, but also to Mary and Jane:

> The state of nature has a law of nature to govern it, which obliges every one: and reason, which is that law, teaches all mankind, . . . that being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions:
>
> (Second Treatise of Civil Government, ii)

In the passage immediately following this one, however, unless we assume that women were not subordinate to men, the use of men and one another must be taken as having specifically masculine, and not generic reference:

> for men being all the workmanship of one omnipotent and infinitely wise maker; . . . there cannot be supposed any such subordination among us, that may authorize us to destroy one another, as if we were made for one another's uses, as the inferior ranks of creatures are for ours.
>
> (Ibid.)

Later in the essay, when he discusses the right of every man to execute the law of nature, he creates a hypothetical situation in which womankind can hardly be thought to participate:

> the execution of the law of nature is, in that state, put into

> every man's hands, whereby every one has a right to punish the transgressors of that law to such a degree, as may hinder its violation: for the law of nature would, as all other laws that concern men in this world, be in vain, if there were nobody that in the state of nature had a power to execute that law, and thereby preserve the innocent and restrain offenders.
>
> (Ibid.)

Locke illustrates the difficulties imposed upon writers by the masculine orientation of language. However much they might have set out to discuss humans without regard to sex, the masculine generic provide a masculine mold for their thoughts, perpetuating the masculine linkage with such terms. Thus, in arguing that men enter into an infinite number of relationships with others, Locke writes:

> and therefore this makes no small part of men's thoughts and words: e.g. one single man may at once be concerned in, and sustain all these following relations, and many more, viz. father, brother, son, grandfather, grandson, father-in-law, son-in-law, husband, friend, enemy, subject, general, judge, patron, client, professor, . . . he being capable of as many relations as there can be occasions of comparing him to other things,
>
> (Essay Concerning Human Understanding II, xxv)

David Hume, like Locke, seems usually to be referring to human nature in a general sense, so that man may be assumed to be a generic:

> The mind of man is subject to certain unaccountable terrors and apprehensions, proceeding either from the unhappy situation of private or public affairs, from ill health, from a gloomy and melancholy disposition, or from the concurrence of all these

> circumstances . . . . Weakness, fear, melancholy, together with ignorance, are, therefore, the true source of Superstition.
>
> (Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary X)

But in Hume's writing, as in much sociological discourse, woman remains a phantom presence. Sometimes she suddenly disappears from what seemed to have been generic references, as in the following passage which specifically excludes women from consideration:

> There are only two Ranks of Men among us [in contemporary England]; Gentlemen, who have some Fortune and Education, and the meanest slaving Poor; . . . . The slaving Poor are incapable of any Principles: Gentlemen may be converted to true Principles, by Time and Experience.
>
> (Ibid.)

The reader is left to ponder whether women can be reckoned among the two ranks of Gentlemen, or whether they constitute some other species, for whom the question of principles does not arise.

Writers like Locke and Hume do not so much deliberately exclude women from their discussions of human nature as overlook them. The tendency persists in writing of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Although they are moving away from a view that the male is the archetypical human, these writers know more about the behavior and society of men than of women. Interpreting their generics becomes difficult, since their speculations are based upon males functioning in male society. When the author shifts in and out of generic usage, the reader must decide whether reference is to people or to males. In the following quotation from Auguste Comte, the first section might be taken as a generic use of men; since the second cannot be, the reader may well doubt that the first was intended as such:

> No doubt there are a multitude of men well enough organized to love their fellow-labourers, however numerous or remote they may be, and however indirect may be their co-operation; but such a sentiment, arising from the reaction of the reason upon the social feelings, could never be strong enough to guide social life. . . . Even the most eminent men, who direct their sympathetic instincts upon their race at large or the society in which they live, are usually impelled to this by the moral disappointments of a domestic life which has failed in some of its conditions.
>
> (The Positive Philosophy II, 6, iii)

Often the usage remains highly problematical. In the following passage from Hegel's "The Civic Community," it is apparent that the first his is generic: Hegel is referring to the entire animal world. The second is dubious: the ability to become independent would probably belong exclusively to males. In the third sentence, given the use of burgher, bourgeois, and the family member . . . he (all semantically marked [+Male]), it is difficult to interpret man as a generic:

> The animal has a limited range of ways and means for satisfying his limited wants. Man in his dependence proves his universality and his ability to become independent, firstly, by multiplying his wants and means, and, secondly, by dissecting the concrete want into parts . . . .
>
> Note.--The object is in right a person, in morals a subject, in the family a member, in the city generally a burgher (bourgeois); and here, at the standpoint of want, he is the concrete product of picture-thought which we call man. Here, and properly only here,

is it that we first speak of man in this sense . . . .

(The Philosophy of Right, § 190)

Throughout the period under consideration the reader is adrift among generics, waiting for some explicit usage to indicate whether the author's discussion is of men or of human beings generally. In discussing suicide types, Durkheim begins with what seems to be a generic, but he slips into an antithetical use of woman which makes obvious that his reference for man was exclusively male from the beginning:

> . . . as has often been said, man is double, that is because social man superimposes himself upon physical man . . . . Suicide is known to be rare among children and to diminish among the aged at the last confines of life; physical man, in both, tends to become the whole of man . . . .
>
> This is also why woman can endure life in isolation more easily than man.

(Suicide, p. 213)

This ambiguous use of generic terminology continued in recent sociological writing. William I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki (1960), in discussing two conflicting human tendencies--the desire for new experiences and the desire for stability--seem to be discussing "the individual" in generic terms. Most of what they say could apply to both sexes. They conclude, however, with examples which suggest, by excluding women, that they have not been thinking of women at all:

> And new experience may mean change of restaurant, change of the temporary sexual relation, change of the kind of work within the same office, the resuming of travel, the acquiring of wealth, getting a divorce, developing a Don Juan attitude toward women,

change of career or specialty, development of amateur or sporting interests, etc.

("Three Types of Personality," p. 411)

The unacknowledged (and perhaps unconscious) masculine orientation of writers toward their subject matter is sometimes amusing. The following discussion of adultery seems to imply that it is possible in adultery to have only one offender (the male participant) and one aggrieved (the spouse of the female participant):

> In cases of adultery a fine is imposed on the offender, the amount varying with the relative status in society of the aggrieved and the guilty party. That some penalty should be inflicted, is acknowledged even by the offender and his relatives; they are merely leagued together to shield him from bodily harm and beat down exhorbitant demands for indemnity. Even if the adulterer is a prominant man supported by a host of henchmen, he does not seek wholly to evade punishment . . . .

(Robert Lowie, The Origin of the State, p. 58)

Some modern writers seem to be conscious of the masculine orientation of their work. Herbert Spencer, in The Study of Sociology, develops a theory of social science in which the properties of the units (individual members) are considered to determine the properties of the aggregate (society). Although the references throughout to man, unit, member, and individual seem to be intended generically, the examples cited are drawn from male interaction. Late in the work, in fact, he feels it necessary to remind the reader--immersed in all this masculine reference--that "Women, as well as men, are units in a society" (p. 340).

Not all writers remember the ladies. In George H. Mead's Mind, Self,

and Society, the hypothetical illustrations include a baseball player, the genius, the medieval saint, the scientist, an engineer, a poet, the king, an assessor, a warrior, the biologist, the logician, the criminal, the officers [of a corp], and the boy and his gang. It is all the same, he argues, whether your property is stolen by Tom, Dick, or Harry (p. 190). In discussing the blow as the historical antecedent of the word, he addresses the reader (presumably male): "A person threatens you, and you knock him down on the spot" (p. 181). He suggests:

> If one does have a genuine superiority, it is a superiority which rests on the performance of definite functions. One is a good surgeon, a good lawyer, and he can pride himself on his superiority --but it is a superiority which he makes use of.
>
> (Mind, Self, and Society, p. 208)

A woman reader has difficulty locating herself in such writing, and, in fact, the elimination of women from illustrations frequently has the effect of eliminating them from consideration at all. In the following passage, one must assume that women have the social stratification of the men to whom they are attached; and unattached women presumably have none:

> Though in their constitutions it is said that "all men are equal," only a quite naive person may infer from this a non-existence of social stratification within these societies. It is enough to mention the gradations: from Henry Ford to a beggar; from the President of the United States to a policeman; from a foreman to the most subordinate worker; from the president of a university to a janitor; from an "LL.D." or "Ph.d." to a "B.A."; from a "leading authority" to an average man; from a commander-in-chief of an army to a soldier; from a president of a board of directors

> of a corporation to its common laborer; from an editor-in-chief of a newspaper to a simple reporter; it is enough to mention these . . . .
>
> (Pitrim Sorokin, Social and Cultural Mobility, p. 14)

Joan Acker (1973) has demonstrated the error of ascribing status in this way. Such errors are easily made in a language which provides a masculine framework in which generalizations about human beings are phrased.

Modern writers are likely to avoid these errors by including women among their examples, reminding the reader (and perhaps themselves) that they are thinking about women as well as men. In illustrating that social science is "properly about . . . the human variety which consists of all the social worlds in which men have lived, are living, and might live" (The Sociological Imagination, p. 132), C. Wright Mills mentions a few neutral groups of humans but many more masculine groups (boys' gangs, Navajo oil men, air forces, policeman, criminal syndicates, and slave dealers, for example). Just as the female reader begins to believe men was intended to refer to males exclusively, she encounters two female references which demonstrate that Mills is thinking generically: he refers to a Hollywood Starlet and to the girl next door.

Now both of these represent masculine ideals of women--the sex goddess or the wholesome virgin--and in this Mills exemplifies a distressing trait among modern sociologists. They may include females in their examples and, thus, may appear to be using terms like the individual or people or man generically, but their orientation remains masculine. Perhaps because the men are unfamiliar with female society and behavior, they tend to think of women solely in terms of their licit and illicit relationships with men.

When such writers discuss women, it is in their roles as mother, wife, girl-friend, or mistress. Vilfredo Pareto, in suggesting a tool for measuring social stratification, outlines some of the possibilities for assigning worth:

> The highest type of lawyer, for instance, will be given 10. The man who does not get a client will be given 1--reserving zero for the man who is an out-and-out idiot. To the man who has made his millions . . . we will give 10. To the man who has earned his thousands we will give 6; to such as just manage to keep out of the poor-house, 1, keeping zero for those who get in. To the woman "in politics," such as the Aspasia of Pericles, the Maintenon of Louis XIV, the Pompadour of Louis XV, who has managed to infatuate a man of power and play a part in the man's career, we shall give some higher number, such as 8 or 9; to the strumpet who merely satisfies the senses of such a man and exerts no influence on public affairs, we shall give zero.
>
> (The Mind and Society, § 2027)

To illustrate the need to suppress self in formal social interaction, Georg Simmel illustrates with examples of men who withhold statements of personal opinions or discussions about their own special interests in order to maintain a general conversation. As an example of how a woman might suppress self, he suggests:

> a lady would not want to appear in such extreme decolletage in a really personal, intimately friendly situation with one or two men as she would in a large company . . . .
>
> ("The Sociology of Sociability," p. 257)

Sometimes adherence to the masculine ideals of women produces nonsense which masquerades as sociology. Erving Goffman believes it culpable for a fifteen-year-old boy to try to pass for eighteen, but he informs the reader that "there are many social contexts in which it would be improper for a woman not to misrepresent herself as being more youthful and sexually attractive than is the case" (The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, p. 61). Sometimes nonsense results from the writers apparent ignorance of woman's human nature, as is the case in the following:

> As she lives outside of community existence more than man, she is less penetrated by it; society is less necessary to her because she is less impregnated with sociability. She has few needs in this direction and satisfies them easily. With a few devotional practices and some animals to care for, the old unmarried woman's life is full. If she remains faithfully attached to religious traditions and thus finds ready protection against suicide, it is because these very simple social forms satisfy all her needs.
>
> (Emile Durkheim, Suicide, p. 215)

The effects of the use of the masculine generic are not purely linguistic. Men (males) have found it easy to trivialize feminist objections to the masculine orientation implicit in the use of the morpheme man (Russell Baker threatens us with Benny Goodperson, for instance), but such diversions are clearly functioning to obscure the profound effects of a language which provides us with male-as-norm. George Simmel argued that the standards of estimating male and female nature were not neutral, but were essentially masculine, and he argued that this was concealed by the naive identification of the concept "human being" and the concept "man" in some (most Western European) languages (quoted by Karen Horney 1967).

The masculine orientation of sociological inquiry has been encouraged by the masculine domination of society, by the masculine domination of the study of sociology, and by the masculine orientation of English. This may have caused scientists to ignore significant traits of human nature. William McDougall has, in discussing the instincts of man, argued that the parental instinct is a primary emotion:

> This primary emotion has been very generally ignored by the philosophers and psychologists; that is, perhaps, to be explained by the fact that this instinct and its emotion are in the main decidedly weaker in men than in women, and in some men, perhaps altogether lacking. We may even surmise that the philosophers as a class are men among whom this defect of native endowment is relatively common.
>
> (An Introduction to Social Psychology, p. 71)

Kasper Naegele also noted in the Editorial Foreword to a selection of articles on "Interaction: Roles and Collectivities," that the masculine bias of the study of sociology might have skewed its findings:

> Still, among them, the thirteen men [included in the section] --and it is interesting to speculate how equally endowed women would have formulated these matters, if in those times they had been free to do so--represent . . . a sense of the order and its development that surrounds us.
>
> (Talcott Parsons et. al., Theories of Society, p. 148)

This is a problem Jessie Bernard cites when she says "Practically all sociology to date has been a sociology of the male world" (1973). Language and inclination have met to produce the masculine bias in sociology. Perhaps

a greater inclusion of women in society and in sociological scholarship may change the nature of the science itself. It may help change the language. When generics are used precisely, when man refers solely to males, then man embracing woman may refer to a reciprocal act far more attractive than either the concept of sociology or of the generic.

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